JOHN DEWEY’S ELOQUENT CITIZEN: COMMUNICATION, JUDGMENT, AND POSTMODERN CAPITALISM

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Of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful (Dewey, 1925).

Perhaps no philosopher since Aristotle has more to offer the rhetorician than does John Dewey. (Burks, 1968)

The quest for “universals of communication” ought to make us shudder (Deleuze, 1995).

John Dewey provides a fertile point of departure for imagining democracy as a form of communicative action. For Dewey, “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated life, or joint communicative experience” (1916, p. 101). James Carey (1997), one of the strongest representatives of a Deweyan inspired view of communication, argues: “what we mean by democracy depends on the forms of communication by which we conduct politics. What we mean by communication depends on the central impulses and aspirations of democratic politics” (p. 234). While Carey (1989) uses Dewey for the purpose of normative critique, rhetorical studies puts Dewey to work on the subject who speaks, argues, and judges. For rhetorical studies, Dewey provides both concrete methods and abstract concepts for manufacturing more democratic citizens who might reasonably deliberate on the public issues of the day. According to Christopher Johnstone (1983), Dewey’s emphasis on the attributes of democratic inquiry offers a modern translation of *phronesis* or practical wisdom. Within the orbit of this Deweyan vision of *phronesis*, rhetoric and argumentation theory provide the tools for the moral development of the eloquent citizen. The purpose of this paper is to challenge the efforts to underwrite citizenship with such aesthetic-moral theory of communication.

After a fifteen-year hiatus from serious discussion, Christopher Johnstone harnessed John Dewey’s thought on “aesthetics, ethics, and the philosophy of knowledge” (p. 186) to the project of building the eloquent citizen. For Johnstone, Dewey’s work contributed to making citizens by cultivating the faculty of *phronesis*. To imagine the eloquent citizen though the faculty of practical wisdom

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1 The first systematic attempt to account for John Dewey’s influence on speech communication took place in 1968 with a symposium in the journal *Western Speech*. The contributors to this symposium were Robley Rhine, Don Burks, Gladys L. Borchers and R. Victor Harnack. The overall assessment of the symposium was that with the exception of Dewey’s reflexive thinking model, often used in speech textbooks, and the debate over this method in the emerging area of small group research, Dewey’s influence up to this time was marginal. Johnstone (1983) introduced his essay 15 years later by suggesting that Don Burks’ call to appreciate Dewey had yet to be taken up in rhetorical studies. I suspect our own return to Dewey twenty years latter is partly a result of the inability of rhetorical studies to appreciate Johnstone’s intervention. Yet, it might simply be the case that Dewey has been so internalized into the fiber of rhetorical studies that it becomes difficult to return to his work to produce a new intervention into our disciplinary conversations. One register of that familiarity may be both the implicit and explicit role of John Dewey in Lloyd Bitzer’s (1987) work. If this symposium succeeds in finding a place for a serious discussion of Dewey, in good Deweyan fashion, it will because our writing contributes to giving a new meaning to Dewey’s writings.
means to think of good citizenship as an ability to deliberate without appealing to general or abstract principles. As Johnstone notes, however, Dewey did not write from the perspective of someone self-conscious of the rhetorical tradition nor did Dewey speak about the classical concept of *phronesis*. Dewey did write about art, he said many things about communication and his emphasis on moral selfhood and “creative intelligence” offers Johnstone an opportunity to translate Dewey’s conceptual heritage into the rhetorical idiom. Johnstone reads Dewey for the purpose of adding him to the rhetorical canon, and rhetorical studies, in return, gets a “contemporary vision of wisdom” (p. 185). In other words, Dewey offers rhetorical studies a critical vocabulary to begin the philosophical modernization of *phronesis*. This essay will take Johnstone’s emphasis on inculcating the rhetorical subject with the attributes of *phronesis* to explore the emergence of an aesthetic-moral theory of communication. The primary claim advanced in this essay is that Dewey provides a modern solution to democratic crisis that may no longer be relevant for a postmodern understanding of capitalism. Put as simply as possible, the tendency to translate communication into an aesthetic-moral theory of eloquent citizenship puts argumentation studies to work for, rather than against, new forms of bio-political control. To unpack this claim I want to pinpoint two crucial processes: the emphasis on rhetorical studies as part of education’s role in cultivating the citizen and the aesthetic notion of communication that re-writes rhetoric as contributing to the moral development of the subject.

**Rhetorical Education: Phronesis, Modernity and the Eloquent Citizen**

The initial reason for Christopher Johnstone’s appropriation of John Dewey requires an appreciation of how Dewey’s approach to the relationship between community and communication contributes to the process of an ethical pedagogy. We can witness this process by unpacking how Dewey’s emphasis on communication begins with its contribution to organizing the interaction between self and other. This emphasis on communication as the glue that binds self and other is made manifest in his idea of community. The normative value of communication resides in the interplay between communication and cooperation, the result of which promotes the value of community as shared action. The cooperative nature of communication was indexed, for Dewey, in its role in generating a shared sense of meaning. From this perspective, to recognize oneself as a subject who communicates is the first step toward accessing the communal bonds that make possible the democratic governance of self and other, or in Dewey’s more public language, the ability to overcome the fragmentation of multiple publics and partake in the Great Community (1927/1954).

At the heart of Johnstone’s recovery of Dewey is the “role of the subject, the person, in the activities of knowing and acting” (p. 185). Thus the “wisdom-generating power of rhetoric” (p. 185) is registered in how it takes the speaking subject as an object domain of criticism, pedagogical intervention and ethical transformation. It is Dewey’s vision of moral selfhood as a process of growth that provides the initial warrant for offering Dewey as a contemporary theorist of practical wisdom. For Johnstone “Dewey emphasizes the significance of intelligent methods of deliberation and choice in determining conduct, and finds the foundation of moral value in the growth of the self, the author of judgment” (p. 187). At the center of Dewey’s approach to practical wisdom is the “method of intelligence,” a process that contributes to the use of communication “to stimulate and guide the development of individual mind and character, that is, of the self” (p. 186).
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Two separate issues reveal themselves: a “set of factors to guide practical deliberation; and second . . . the habits and attitudes to be cultivated in the individual” (p. 188).

A Deweyan view of practical wisdom begins with “practical judgments [as] predictions or anticipations of consequences” (p. 188). This consequential view of judgment has a close affinity to Dewey’s idea concerning how a public forms as a felt need to address the consequences of action. The emphasis on consequences is also a standard rhetorical vision that often underwrites normative theories of public argument (Goodnight, 1989). The importance for communication of this consequential view of judgment is that it invites the student to nurture communication’s role in generating the attributes of foresight and empathy (Belman, 1977). The second factor to guide practical deliberation is the ability to account for the multiple consequences of actions (Johnstone, 1983, p. 188). The moral value of this claim is that debates over the relationship between ends and means must be re-figured to take into account the complex and multiple consequences of practical judgment. Since practical judgment must always stay open to the consequences of actions, the relationships between ends and means are transformed into a more singular process or “transitional points between two phases of experience” (Johnstone, 1983). Thus all conduct must be, for Johnstone, “appraised in terms of how they will serve the ‘continuum of action’” (p. 189). The primary goal in practical deliberation is both the immediate satisfaction of a felt need and the creation of “conditions that will make future satisfaction more likely and extensive” (p. 189). The decision-making process, therefore, can never be closed down, neither by an appeal to an abstract principle to guide all judgments nor by an appeal to instrumental success. Dewey’s pragmatic standard of utility provides an immanent, as opposed to transcendental, approach to practical judgment. An immanent approach suggests that no judgment can appeal to some moral authority outside of human history to determine right action. In other words, “the only ultimate value which can be set up is just the process of living itself” (Dewey, 1944, qtd. in Johnstone, p. 189). Practical wisdom, for Johnstone, is the “capacity for living in such a way” as to make the experiences of life “enduring, satisfying, and inclusive of its enjoyments” (p. 189).

In order to maintain the conditions for practical judgment it will be necessary for the subject to cultivate good habits of deliberation. For Dewey, the consequences of an act include the effects those acts have on moral character “confirming and weakening habits, as well as tangibly obvious results” (Dewey, 1930, qtd. in Johnstone, 1983, p. 190). All acts of judgment, a process that requires speaking and thinking, form the character of the subject that judges. Similar to the classical idea of ethos, or the literary idea of persona, the consequences of any act of decision making must be registered in the ways those acts form the character of the subject. One must be aware, therefore, of the “growth of the self: the cultivation of habits and dispositions that will sustain the capacity for intelligent choice” (p. 190). Since judgments take place in an interactional environment, the moral self envisioned by Dewey’s project must respect the “opportunities for continued growth for all who are affected by one’s conduct” (p. 190). For Johnstone, then, Dewey’s concern over the evolutionary dynamic of moral growth leads to the need to nurture four habits of practical judgment: creative intelligence, responsibility, freedom and the expansion of mind (pp. 190-192).

Creative intelligence requires that judgment be guided by “open minded and impartial inquiry” so that judgments might be sensed as “tentative, flexible, and capable of modification” (p. 191). It promotes foresight about the consequences of action and it calls for a “heightened sensitivity” to the signifi-
cance of events. Responsibility demands a “responsiveness to the well-being and growth of others.” One is to cultivate this habit of responsibility so as to negotiate the “connection between the individual and community” (p. 191). The habit of freedom is made manifest in keeping oneself “open to new experiences” so as to “reinforce the habit of growth” (p. 191). Freedom, from this perspective, is a way for the mind to explore the world and its surroundings. The more we recognize our possibilities for growth, the more “we are actually free” (Dewey, 1960, qtd. in Johnstone, p. 192). Finally, the habit of an expanding mind is nurtured through the ability to “grasp the patterns or regularities in experience” (Johnstone, 1983, p. 192). To do so requires the role of communication to provide meaning to those actions and events that make up the world. Moral growth, therefore, also means the growth in one’s sense-making capabilities so that one’s growth might be furthered by an “awareness of the wholeness of experience” (Johnstone, 1983, p. 192).

There is no doubt that an ethical pedagogy committed to nurturing the habits of creative intelligence, responsibility, freedom, and sense-making is a worthy goal of any argumentation teacher. Yet, at this point, I want to begin to outline my first reservation about the modernization of phronēsis. The essential feature of education for Dewey requires the recognition that conditions and habits of judgments are presented as attributes of a subject that require cultivation. The emphasis on moral growth as a sense making activity, done in concert with others, is what I take to be a very modern conception of the subject, part of the history of communication as a dialogic process to overcome the fragmentation of community set loose by modernity (Rose, 1996). What Dewey provides rhetorical studies is a modern vision of a moral subject in need of cultivation and growth. In so doing, Johnstone’s appropriation of Dewey mimics the modern idea of culture as a “general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development” (Williams, 1983, qtd. by Bennett, 1992, p. 25).

The desire to intervene pedagogically into this process institutionally is characteristic of the liberal encounter between culture and the state that begins in earnest in the nineteenth century. While liberalism holds certain activities to be outside state regulation, this is done so that it might govern more efficiently, that is, govern at a distance (Bennett, 1998). The nineteenth and twentieth century investment in education contributes to a liberal re-coding of the role of the state. Following Gramsci, Tony Bennett (1998) refers to this recoding of liberalism’s relationship to the state as the ethical state, an educator for the purpose of inculcating subjects with a code of good behavior. The point of this mode of ethical intervention is to create the conditions whereby a subject can govern its self and, therefore, avoid conditions that call forth externally imposed regulations. What liberalism does with culture in the 19th century, Johnstone does for rhetorical studies in the 20th century. Rhetorical practice, judgment and communication appear as both an instrument and a field of social management for generating the attributes of good citizenship. While the roots of such a view might be authorized by the classical tradition of rhetorical studies, it is only when democracy and citizenship are re-figured as essentially a discursive and/or communicative process that rhetorical studies can assert itself as the cultural knowledge required for the moral development of the democratic citizen. Since the habits of good judgment require cultivation, agents must be enlisted to help subjects fold these habits onto their souls. One such agent, in the case of Christopher Johnstone, is the art of rhetoric. In this way, phronēsis emerges from intellectual obscurity by attaching itself to the liberal vision of the ethical state by cultivating citi-
izens in and through the management of their communicative behaviors.

At this point, I want to re-direct our critical attention to how a Foucauldian approach to phronesis contributes to our understanding of a moral theory of judgment. The shift in perspective allows the conceptual vocabulary necessary to re-think the rhetorical cultivation of phronesis as a "technology of the self" (Foucault, 1988). For Foucault, a technology of the self is a peculiar practice that a subject, often with the help of experts, engages in as a way to form himself or herself as a subject of a particular kind. As Hicks and Greene (2000) argue, a Foucauldian approach makes visible how the pedagogical domain of argumentation and rhetorical studies emerges to re-write rhetorical studies as a moral pedagogy. More specifically, the point of a rhetorical education becomes increasingly concerned with harnessing rhetorical performance, rhetorical history, and rhetorical criticism to an ethical mode of citizenship. However, to make this theoretical move more concrete, I need to return to Foucault's idea of ethics to make clear how his approach to ethics differs from standard approaches to communicative ethics.

Foucault's writings on governmentality and ethics have received very little attention in rhetoric and argumentation studies. Perhaps this is because Foucault (1984) conceptualizes ethics in a very peculiar way: "the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself... and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself [or herself] as a moral subject of his [or her] own actions" (p. 352). What is peculiar about this approach is that Foucault's ethical genealogies are not located in the domain of moral theory, or what he calls, the moral code, the prescriptions which are imposed on individual acts. As Elspeth Probyn (1993) writes, Foucault's ethical theory is about "how one becomes a self to oneself and to the other" (p. 108). In Foucault's ethical genealogies we are left with three concepts: acts, which describe the behavior of individuals; moral codes or prescriptions, which work by setting up a border between the permitted and forbidden and/or norms of positive and negative value; and, finally, ethics, or the self-fashioning of a moral subject. This view of ethics is different from how most communication scholars are likely to think about ethics. Kenneth Anderson (1999) provides a useful heuristic for understanding how communication scholars often think about ethics: "Ethics (moral philosophy) is the systematic study of value concepts such as good, bad, fair, honest, just and the application of such terms to actions and intentions and as descriptors of character" (p. 521). In Foucault's vocabulary, this definition privileges the relationship between acts and moral codes, leaving behind the process of self-fashioning, a process that Foucault calls subjectification. It is his focus on how one takes upon oneself his/her own self-constitution as a moral subject that allows Foucault to think otherwise about ethics.

It is instructive to return to Foucault's notion of ethics to explore the particular elements of a modern translation of phronesis as a mode of ethical subjectification. Foucault offers four elements in his network of concepts for doing a genealogy of ethics. The first is what he calls the ethical substance. The ethical substance is the particular material of the subject that is going to be worked on by the techniques of the self. Johnstone's focus on Dewey highlights judgment as the ethical substance to be worked on to create an eloquent citizen. The second concept is the mode of subjection. The mode of subjection describes the ways "people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obliga-

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2 The key exceptions to this claim are the works by myself (1998b, 1999, 2001); works by Greene and Hicks (1998); work by Hicks (2001); and an essay by Hicks and Langsdorf (1999). Ono and Sloop (2002) pick up my rhetorical approach on governmentality as part of a dialogue with their effort to generate a critical rhetoric.
tions” (p. 353). From the standpoint of a rhetorical pedagogy of *phronesis*, eloquence invites students to accept their moral obligation through an appeal to freedom registered in their moral development. The third concept concerns the specific techniques or means by which subjects work on their ethical substance. In Johnstone’s hands (and others), rhetorical techniques of self-formation are primarily associated with the interplay between discursive production, textual interpretation and deliberation. Rhetorical studies as a technology of the self teaches students how to read, write, speak, and reason in ways to promote the habits of good judgment. Finally, the fourth concept in Foucault’s network is the telos, “the kind of being to which we aspire to be” (p. 355). For Johnstone, the telos of rhetorical studies as a moral pedagogy is eloquence—citizenship recoded in the classical ideal of the good man [sic] speaking well. Thus, when faced with the crisis of liberal democracy, rhetorical studies turns its attention to changing the nature of the subject who communicates.

From the perspective of an ethics of judgment, the elements of rhetorical studies—discourse production, historical knowledge, interpretation and aesthetics—are merged into one project dedicated to assembling the eloquent citizen. The eloquent citizen is the result of internalizing a series of rhetorical behaviors to secure their status as democratic subjects. To recognize rhetorical studies as an ethical pedagogy highlights its role as a form of productive power, that is, its ability to create and generate particular forms of subjectivity. At the same time, this form of rhetorical power creates a mechanism for normalizing and distributing citizenship along the axis of eloquence as practical wisdom. In other words, eloquence as an ethical pedagogy of citizenship creates a border between citizens and their others based on rhetorical principles of right conduct and good judgment. In the case of Johnstone’s appropriation of Dewey, these rhetorical principles privilege the process of deliberation as the dividing line between citizens in good standing and those in need of correction/normalization and/or exclusion. To privilege *phronesis* in the constitution of the eloquent citizen gives aid and comfort to the liberal ethical state, both nationally and internationally, to intervene to correct how people judge and what they judge to be in their own interest. For what lurks behind the project of building an eloquent citizen is the dream of consensus through communication and judgment, a consensus that requires the exclusion and/or normalization of those who do not consent. To unpack the productive power lurking within the judgment of the eloquent citizen requires a return to the relationship between aesthetics, moral development and communication.

**The Aesthetic Turn and Postmodern Capitalism**

For Johnstone (1983), the art of rhetoric should contribute to the principles that will “aid in the generation of discourse capable of fostering the growth of moral selves” (p. 193). Due to Dewey’s view of the educative and aesthetic dimensions of communication, Johnstone argues that Dewey invites rhetorical studies to envision itself “as the primary agency of moral growth, consequently, as the principal means to the development of wisdom” (Johnstone, p. 193). Communication is so integral to Dewey’s idea of the moral self that it becomes both the terrain and the mechanism by which moral growth takes place. Four characteristics of Dewey’s view of communication are highlighted. First, communication is represented as “the basis of all personal development” (p. 193). Second, because communication generates meaning, it is an “essential tool for creating and testing knowledge” (p. 193). Third, communication is reflexive. Since it creates the possibility of a common experience, it generates changes in the dispositions of both self
and other. Finally, Dewey’s pragmatic view of communication aligns itself with the common sense view of the rhetorical as a cultural practice to influence folks symbolically to resolve a felt need or problem.

The artistic dimensions of communication serve to re-orient the purpose of rhetorical studies. Communication as an aesthetic process, influenced by Dewey, requires the rhetorical theorist to pay attention to how communication selects subject matter to form an experience. In this way, communication as an art brings form to matter by making matter a “perceivable, graspable, knowable thing” (Johnstone, 1983, p. 195). The form of communication provides meaning for a speaker and an audience that will guide the perception of the world. From Johnstone’s perspective, Dewey’s aesthetic theory of communication brings forth a conscious encounter with the world and its surroundings by making one conscious of the meaning of events. Of course, meanings are never stable. They are open to change through new linguistic forms that bring disorder to our routine habits of experiencing the world. However, by initiating the act of interpretation and thinking, communication does not simply represent the world. The speaker and his or her audience are brought into being by the artistic dimensions of communication. This aesthetic view of communication allows Dewey’s work to align itself with a constitutive theory of rhetorical effect, that is, it moves us away from strict instrumental views of the success or failures of the goals and purposes for which speech is put to use, and directs our attention to the formal qualities of communicative action to transform speakers, situations, and audiences regardless of the particular content of a message (Greene, 1999b).

We need to understand how this particular notion of communication’s constitutive or aesthetic characteristic partakes in securing consensus. To put it loosely, Johnstone’s appropriation of Dewey emphasizes the epistemic and sense-making potential of communication. While the advantage of this view is that the world becomes open to change through new forms of sense making, it should be stressed that the “world becomes open only through human intervention” (De Landa, 1999, p. 30). We are faced, then, with a very modern idea of communication assembling a human subject as the author of knowledge and action (Rose, 1996). The problem of incommensurability also follows the attempt to privilege the sense-making ability of communication. As we begin to understand the world as a social construction made possible by shared sense making, one must take into account how forms of sense-making and the “conventional concepts of a given culture” (De Landa, 1999, p. 30) place limits on one’s ability to move outside of one’s habitual way of understanding the world. A cultural approach to the social construction of reality recognizes that the problem of incommensurability cannot be avoided because “each conceptual scheme [constructs] its own reality so that bridges between worlds are hard, if not impossible, to build” (De Landa, 1999, p. 30). How, then, does the vision of an eloquent citizen avoid the problem of incommensurability? Not surprisingly, Dewey calls forth the religious vision of communication “whereby meanings are enhanced, deepened, and solidified in the sense of communion” (Dewey, 1925, p. 205). I want to highlight how this sense of communion is made possible by recoding communication as a moral imperative.

For Johnstone (1983), Dewey provides the tools to re-write eloquence as a way to suture the self with its others, generating a sense of unity with the world. Johnstone writes, “eloquence occurs when the act of expression creates for communicators an experience in which unresolved elements of previous effort are unified and completed” (p. 198). The formal qualities of the art of rhetoric create the potentiality of bringing forth a “feeling of harmony” insofar as the aesthetic “com-
plete, unifies, and harmonizes the self in one or more of its aspects by integrating impulses and perceptions that were previously inchoate or discordant” (p. 198). From this perspective, the aesthetic experience of the eloquent citizen begins to un hinge itself from an immanent social philosophy—one without outside moral authorities to guide social action—to one in which communication and the willingness to communicate become the outside moral authority regulating citizenship. As such, it becomes a political and moral imperative for the subject to remain open to the call of communication. In Dewey’s terms, we must partake in “a yielding [of] the self” (Dewey, 1934, qtd. in Johnstone, p. 200) so that we might “perceive and exploit in it whatever potential [communication] has for creating wisdom in us, we must be willing for a moment to surrender ourselves to it” (Johnstone, 1983, p. 200). To form the habits of good judgment, we are called upon to be open to communication, to recognize that the rhetorical art offers practical wisdom because it holds out the potential to promote our moral development through bringing us out of our fragmented natures and our incoherent sensations of the world and beyond the problem of incommensurability. It is the complete incorporation of the world’s sensations to the moral requirement of universal communication, whereby no sensation escapes the transcendental moral authority of communication, that makes Deleuze shudder.

No matter how humane and reasonable Dewey’s project seems for rhetorical studies, its modern presuppositions about communication need to be explained more carefully. It is no longer possible simply to explicate an ideal of human subjectivity based on communication without taking into account the historical conditions that help to explain the emergence of this very form of subjectivity. The aesthetic turn requires the moral imperative that the eloquent citizen be open to the demands of universal communicability. As such, the aesthetic-moral theory of communication underwriting Dewey’s appropriation in rhetorical studies creates a modern political analogy for the democratic unity of self and other (Lloyd, 1990). In this way, the economic and social fragmentation of political subjectivities can be resolved through a modern vision of communication’s aesthetic-moral power. However, the political analogy made possible by conceptualizing citizenship on the grounds of an aesthetic-moral theory of communication is no longer adequate to the task of political critique. Instead, aesthetic-moral theories of communication are more likely to be implicated in new forms of bio-political power in postmodern capitalism. This more historical sensitivity to the emergence of an eloquent citizen is warranted by Gilles Deleuze’s challenge that “maybe speech and communication have been corrupted. They’re thoroughly permeated by money—and not by accident but by their very nature” (1995, p. 175). How wonderful is communication if communication is increasingly the instrument and field of knowledge necessary for bringing about a “society of control,” a system of governance in which “nothing’s left alone for long,” and everything and everyone is subjected to a form of “modulation, like a self-transmuting molding, continually changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 179)? To make a historical intervention in the constitution of the citizen as a subject that communicates one requires a more material history of the subject than the one provided by Johnstone’s appropriation of Dewey.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) offer a starting point for uncovering the history of the communicative subject by offering a materialist ontology for understanding the rupture from modernity to postmodernity. At the center of this ontology is the ability of capital to extend its reach both extensively across the globe and intensively
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into the very fabric of life. What marks the rupture of postmodern capitalism is the culmination of the process described by Marx as the real subsumption of labor. The real subsumption of labor implies that capital no longer relies on an outside to find a market to capitalize value, but instead integrates labor “ever more completely” within the logics of capital. In this way, Hardt and Negri suggest that capital is now immanent, it exists without an outside. However, the real subsumption of labor also relies on a shift in how capitalism creates value. Capitalism is thoroughly invested in the production of life itself, creating a new terrain of biopolitical production. To put it bluntly, capitalism is fully implicated in producing life and social being.

One of the consequences of this biopolitical terrain of production is that it becomes necessary to re-think the nature of productive labor. Hardt and Negri (2000), drawing on work done in Italy, suggest that the tendency of productive labor is to “become increasingly immaterial” (p. 29). Immaterial labor describes how surplus value increasingly depends on the exploitation of intellectual, communicative and affective forms of production. Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) highlights that immaterial labor refers to changes in the production of commodities by emphasizing the “informational content” of the commodity, that is, how the labor process increasingly requires skills for handling information, making decisions and using cybernetic and communication technologies (pp. 133-134). Immaterial labor also has a “cultural content” whereby “the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashion, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion” (p. 133) are brought directly into the production process. For Hardt and Negri (2000) immaterial labor must also include “the productivity of bodies and the value of affect” (p. 30). Immaterial labor does not mean that other forms of labor do not exist, nor does it suggest manual labor disappears, nor does immaterial labor simply mean that intellectual work comes under the sign of commodification. What the concept of immaterial labor designates is that the very distinction between mental and manual labor can no longer grasp how postmodern capitalism requires “mass intellectuality,” an active laboring subject capable of managing the informational and cultural content of commodities (Lazzarato, 1996).

In light of the importance of communication to immaterial labor, it is important to realize how the concept of immaterial labor obliterates the idea of the base-superstructure model for imagining the location of communication. The base-superstructure model has a tendency to view communication as something taking place outside of the forces and relations of production. In other words, the cultural and political significance of communication is often registered in how it can represent more material forces taking place at the economic infrastructure of society. However, once we begin to understand that communication and the cultural content of the commodity are now part of the production process, the base-superstructure model no longer makes any sense. It is a remnant of a modern view of the relationship between capitalism and communication. The new forms of capitalism, inspired by bio-political production, use communication as the wedge to create a global “control society” whereby “power reaches down to the ganglia of the social structure and its process of development . . . [it] extends throughout the depths of the consciousnesses and bodies of the population—at the same time across the entirety of social relations” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 24).

It is the terrain of biopolitical production and the concept of immaterial labor that provides a key shift in perspective for understanding the past and future of the eloquent citizen. While modernity made distinctions
between productive labor and social labor, base and superstructure, forces of production and relations of production, and civil society and state, these distinctions are being re-formulated by the “control society.” In this way, it becomes increasingly difficult to appeal to communication as an aesthetic-moral theory of citizenship to underwrite a normative theory of resistance to the control society, since the control society is already putting the communicative subject to work for harnessing the value of immaterial labor. The problem for an aesthetic-moral theory of communication is that the importance of a more active laboring subject for postmodern capitalism requires the moral imperative to speak. As Maurizio Lazzaretto (1996) points out, to harness the value of immaterial labor “one has to express oneself, one has to speak, communicate, cooperate and so forth” (p. 135). From this perspective, one cannot rely on the eloquent citizen and practical wisdom to right the wrongs of democracy in an age of postmodern capitalism. The eloquent citizen fails because the subsumption of communication networks, communication industries, and communicative labor to the terrain of bio-political production disables the Habermasian distinction between the instrumental rationality of the economy and the communicative rationality of the lifeworld. Communication has been thoroughly incorporated onto the terrain of postmodern capitalist production (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 404). The attempt to build the eloquent citizen through a moral imperative to communicate only feeds the demands of postmodern capitalism and the control society to produce and expropriate the value of immaterial labor. Put differently, an aesthetic-moral theory of communication can no longer offer a counterforce to the crisis of democracy because this very theory of the subject currently underwrites the changes in the production process of postmodern capitalism.

CONCLUSION

Due to the changing nature of capitalist production, it becomes necessary to re-think the aesthetic-moral theory that underwrites Dewey’s contribution to the eloquent citizen. The importance of immaterial labor for postmodern capitalism suggests one historical condition that explains the investment in a form of human subjectivity that privileges communication and the eloquent citizen. The translation of the classical idea of phronesis into the modern vocabulary of an aesthetic-moral theory of communication authorizes rhetorical studies, as a discipline of the ethical state, to intervene and care for the communicative capacities of its students. The role of the ethical state to govern its citizens from a distance gestures toward a second condition for the emergence of communication as the defining characteristic of the eloquent citizen. The desire to overcome the fragmentation of self and other unleashed by modernity generates the advocacy of communication as a likely solution to bring about a new sense of community and communion. This aesthetic analogy for building a democratic politics is the third condition for the emergence of the eloquent citizen. Whether or not rhetorical and argumentation studies will be able to hold onto its own disciplinary authority for generating eloquent citizens in and through communication remains an open question. However, its desire to assert rhetorical studies as the agent for inculcating students with a moral imperative to remain open to the call of communication is evidenced by Christopher Johnstone’s uptake of John Dewey. The problem with this moral imperative is that it posits communication as a transcendental authority commanding the subject to speak.

The effort to transform communication into an aesthetic-moral theory evacuates the need to account carefully for the historical importance of communication in the ethical
self-fashioning of subjectivity. The much harder work for those committed to an aesthetic approach to rhetorical communication is to abandon the view of the eloquent citizen as a moral solution to the crisis of democracy. By focusing on the uptake of John Dewey’s work in rhetorical studies, this paper suggests that a more historically sensitive approach to the eloquent citizen requires an appreciation of how rhetoric and communication circulate as technologies of the self. To fail to account for this history is to miss how rhetorical studies modernizes itself as an arm of the ethical state to care for the communicative needs of its citizens. Without a history of rhetoric as a technology of the self, an aesthetic-moral theory of communication produces new borders between citizens and their others based on the category of judgment and consensus. Finally, to ignore the history of communication as a modern form of self-fashioning ignores how capitalism relies on communication for the production of value.

The history of communication as an ethical pedagogy requires a new theoretical direction for the aesthetic turn. What is now required, in opposition to an aesthetic-moral theory of communication, is an aesthetic-economic theory of communication. An aesthetic-economic theory of communication takes into account how rhetoric and argumentation contribute to the self-fashioning of subjects as well as how productive labor relies on communication and cooperation. To shift from an aesthetic moral theory to an aesthetic-economic theory of communication allows for a new materialist rhetoric (Greene, 1998a) to recognize how the struggle over the productive value of communication and cooperation is a struggle for a new form of governance—a form of governance in which the potential for communism is imminent in the struggle for the value of communication.

**References**


